

ISSUED MONTHLY BY THE
CALIFORNIA STATE
WAR COUNCIL

News

about
COMMUNITY WAR ACTIVITIES

Vol. 1, No. 4

Sacramento, California

May 15, 1944

An Open Letter to the Cities and Counties of California From Governor Earl Warren

The California State Guard needs men.

I am free to tell the community leaders to whom this is addressed that the troops stationed in California are constantly being drained away from this coast in order to take part in the increasingly heavy fighting in the Pacific area. Lieutenant General Emmons, Commanding General, Western Defense Command, has written to me to say that the State Guard is now an indispensable part of the protection of California.

You need not be told that we have a grave responsibility. California is nearer to the battle-lines, and more important to the conduct of the war by reason of our vital natural resources and war industries, than almost any other State. It is our job not only to protect this arsenal of war, but also to protect our own homes.

An important part of this specific task belongs to the State Guard. Last year, by legislative enactment, the Guard was completely reorganized. It is a home guard in the truest sense, composed of male citizens 18 to 64 years old. No Guard unit may be sent outside the boundaries of its home county without its consent. No Guard unit may be drafted as a unit into the Army. However, the Army gives the Guard its full support, supplies uniforms and equipment and makes training possible. General Emmons tells me that the Guard has proved its worth in recent military exercises, and that increasing the strength of the Guard will make possible the release of more Federal troops for duty over seas.

All that is required of a Guard member is that he drill two and a half hours a week and receive basic training similar to that given to the regular Army. In time of emergency, each Guard unit is called to active protection of its home community.

As Governor of the State of California and co-holder with you of the responsibility for the protection of this State, I ask that you assist to your fullest ability in telling California men how desperately they are needed in the State Guard. I shall appreciate a letter from mayors and chairmen of boards of supervisors, addressed to me, telling me of the willingness of your city or county to do so. Upon receipt of such a letter, we will give you all the assistance possible in organizing a local unit of the State Guard.

Earl Warren
Governor of California

WAR COUNCIL

Legislature to be asked for permanent disaster set-up

In order to strengthen the attack on war problems in California and to cement the State's readiness for any disaster, the State War Council has decided to ask the Legislature to convert the present War Powers Act into a permanent emergency and disaster plan. At the same time, the War Council wants to turn over as many of its own activities as possible to the regular State departments, because they are more strongly staffed to do a good job.

The War Council also formally approved all mutual aid fire plans which were redrafted to place the dispatching of equipment in the hands of qualified local authorities and to channel communications through normal State networks.

These decisions were reached at the May 5th meeting of the State War Council. Governor Earl Warren and State Director of Civilian Defense Richard Graves, who laid the proposals before the other members of the Council, told the group that the suggested changes are in line with the trend in many California communities to place responsibility for emergency action in the hands of normal departments of government.

A War Council subcommittee, appointed by the Governor, is mapping out a detailed plan which will be considered by the Council at a special May 19th meet-

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VOL. 1 MAY 15, 1944 No. 4

Issued monthly by the office of State Director of Civilian Defense with news about community war activities in California.

CALIFORNIA STATE WAR COUNCIL

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A Better Mousetrap

Because we need a better way to do a bigger job, the State War Council is going to ask the State Legislature to provide that better way.

That, in brief, is the meaning of the headlines which blossomed all over California after the May 5th meeting of the War Council. The Council, in a manner almost unprecedented among governmental agencies, knows its own limitations and wants to do something about it. The job of serving the cities and counties of this State by providing information, guidance and advice on their wartime problems has gone far beyond the powers of an emergency, temporary sort of body, limited in staff, limited in finances, and limited in its ability to reach into the future.

It was different when the War Council was created. Then we were still expecting waves of enemy planes. Then, too, we had little with which to face those planes except a small nucleus of trained personnel and the bare, untrained but willing hands of the whole population of California.

AS IT HAPPENS In the Communities

An expedition into isolated ranching country to collect old machinery which had accumulated for three-quarters of a century was the most spectacular activity of the Ojai Salvage Committee, headed by H. H. Flesher. Thirteen Army trucks and 30 Lions Club members helped move out 75 tons of scrap metal. A Salvage Lot in the center of town has been filled four times. Another feature of Ojai's eminently successful scrap drive is a Victory House, with a different women's club conducting a Victory Salvage Sale each month. Usable articles are put back into circulation and the proceeds go to charity.

ASSURANCE

A committee to seek ways of convincing the fighting men that the home front is neither chiseling nor griping, but doing all in its power to help the war effort and back up service men has been formed by the Three Cities (Bur-

lingame, San Mateo and Hillsborough) Defense Council.

FIRE

Most Californians have read about San Francisco's recent New Amsterdam Hotel fire. Most Californians do not know, however, that even more than 22 lives might have been lost had not 40 auxiliary firemen and five auxiliary policemen of the Citizen's Defense Corps, plus chiefs of the rescue service, reported for duty that night. The auxiliary police received commendation in Police Department General Orders for their work. The same night as the hotel catastrophe, an auxiliary fireman was injured fighting a blaze in the same neighborhood.

PRE-INDUCTION

A score of communities already have active programs for helping out men just before they are inducted into the armed forces. Plans for inductee informational meetings are under way in the cities and counties of Los Angeles and San Francisco, as well as in San Diego, Kern, Kings, Tulare, Fresno,

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end with the war, either. We'll reap this unhappy crop for years to come. The Youth Authority, like the fire chiefs and the police chiefs, will be here long after the armbands are a historical memento. Why not give the job to the Youth Authority?

It is natural to ask what will happen to the local defense councils and war councils after the State War Council gives way to a permanent disaster set-up. The State isn't dictating the answer to that one. There are lots of alternatives, but nobody can choose the right one except the very people who are concerned. Some cities or counties may want to keep their defense councils. Some may want to convert the council, as the State is doing, into some permanent disaster arrangement.

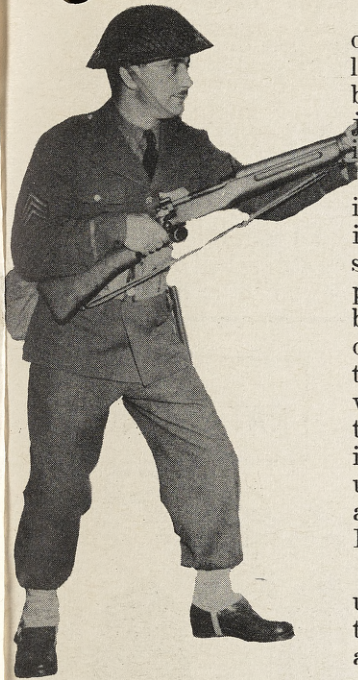
One thing is sure: no locality can afford to stop doing the vital war jobs, such as maintenance of a good protective organization, such as salvage, war bond sales, food conservation and all the rest. The way the job is done isn't important, just so long as the job is done, and done well. The State, for one, is trying to build a better mousetrap. It expects to go on catching mice for the duration—and beyond.

During the past year the War Powers Act has put the necessary weapons into those bare hands. Mutual aid plans have come into being. Communications nets have been augmented where necessary. Expert military advice has been provided to help determine just how many auxiliaries and volunteers are needed. Training systems have been set up.

Now the big job of organizing for protection is done. Now we've got to settle in for the long pull of a long war and a difficult peace. Fire chiefs and police chiefs, regardless of personality and regardless of the climate of public opinion, go on forever. War councils don't. So here's where the War Council bows out.

Except for the job of co-ordination, the State War Council also ought to bow out where many war problems are concerned. In its own grim manner, the war has made big problems out of little problems and new problems where no problems existed before. The juvenile delinquency question, to cite only one, has become so serious that it takes the combined talent and knowledge of a substantial staff to tackle it. And it's not a problem that's going to

DEAR SON --



It's been a long time since your old man has written you. I've been letting Mom do the letter-writing for both of us because she seems to know just what you are interested in hearing about home.

I must confess that I'd been feeling pretty useless. What was I doing? Just plugging along at the same old stand, not even in a war plant. Sure, they told me my little business is "an essential part of the community" and I guess it is, at that. But you know what I mean. I was a useless guy, getting gray, getting old, and you, my son, were fighting it out there single-handed. I used to dream about you, sometimes, and wake up in a cold sweat—but I'd wake up safe, in my own bed.

Son—don't laugh—but I'm in uniform now, too. I've found a way to help. I even think you might be a little proud of me.

A couple of month ago I was riding home in the street car one evening when I overheard a couple of men talking behind me. One of them was saying that his son had been stationed at a camp a little way out of town but that the whole outfit had been sent overseas. At first I was irritated that he should be discussing such matters in a public place, where anyone might be listening. Then I got to thinking it over and I realized that, by golly, a lot of men *have* been moved out of here. I inquired about it later and I found out that they're constantly sending men out of the Army installations in California to the fighting fronts—and that movement is increasing every day of the war.

I guess I got a little sore. Here California was so important in war industry, we're right on the edge of the Pacific—and the Army yanks out our defensive forces! It was only a couple of weeks ago that I read in the paper that the Western Defense Command expects California to be hit by commando raids. And still they were leaving us unprotected!

Son, your old man put his foot in it then. You know the mayor and I belong to the same lodge. So the next time I went to a meeting I button-holed him and started making a speech about how he ought to do something about it, talk to the Army, protest—I don't know just what I had in mind. I said California was the home my son was coming back to and, by golly, I didn't want to see it get all messed up before you had a chance to see it again.

The mayor listened without saying anything. Then, when I was through, he told me quietly that he agreed with everything I said. But, he pointed out, the responsibility for protecting this town and the things in it is really ours! The Army's job is to fight the war, and the men that used to be here are needed even more

desperately on the fighting fronts, that's why they were sent there. And if my home meant so much to me, he said, why didn't I do something about it myself?

Then the mayor let me have it. I was sore, for a minute. He said I wasn't doing a damn thing except complain and go back and forth to work every day. (I knew it was true—that's what made me madder.) And all the while, he said, there was a way I could protect my home—and *your* home—and make my son proud of me, to boot.

So here I am, son, in uniform. I took the mayor's advice and I joined the local unit of the State Guard. I've been in it for almost six weeks. I've got a uniform and a gun and all the rest. I drill one night a week, for two and a half hours, in the Armory along with a lot of our neighbors—kids of 18, men my own age, even a few guys over 60.

Son—It's hard to tell you how much this all means to me. I'm getting the same kind of basic training you got. My instructor is a man who went to a special training school the Army gave for State Guard. My uniform, my equipment—the Army provides them and they're just like yours. In case of emergency, and I'm called to active duty, I'll get the same pay you get.

Our job is simple. Mainly it's to be ready at all times—ready for trouble, any kind of trouble. Of course we hope trouble won't come. I figure the State Guard is like an insurance policy. Just the way I took out insurance on my life and my car. I've taken out insurance on my home and my country by joining the Guard. I don't want to sound sentimental, but patriotism itself is a kind of insurance, isn't it?

Never thought your hard-headed Pop would talk like this, did you?

I was afraid Mom would laugh, when I first told her. But she got a frightened expression, instead, a little like the way she looked when you first walked in in your uniform. She was afraid I'd be shipped out of the Country or something. But there's a new State Guard law passed about a year ago, which reorganized the whole business, made it impossible to send any unit out of the county without its permission. And we can't be sent out of the Country either. Our job is to protect our own home town.

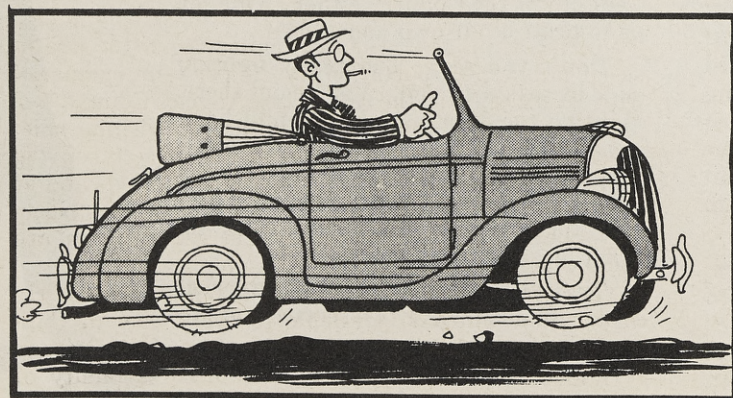
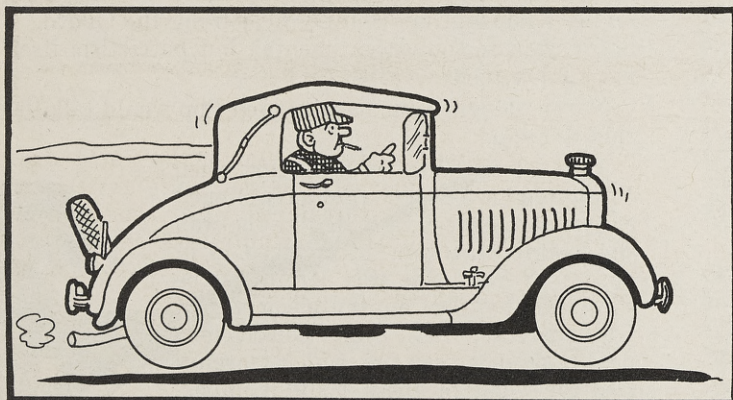
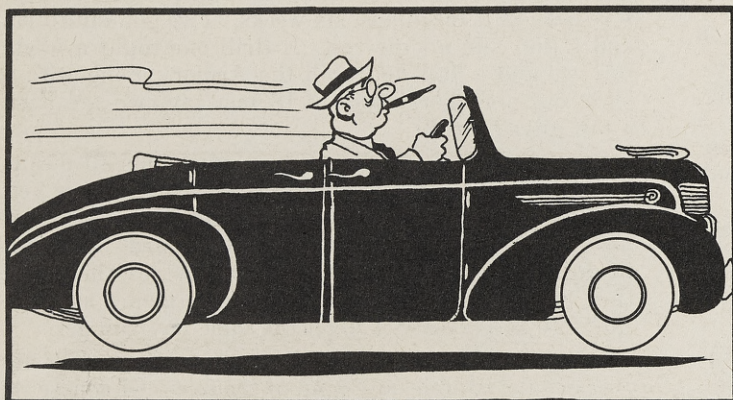
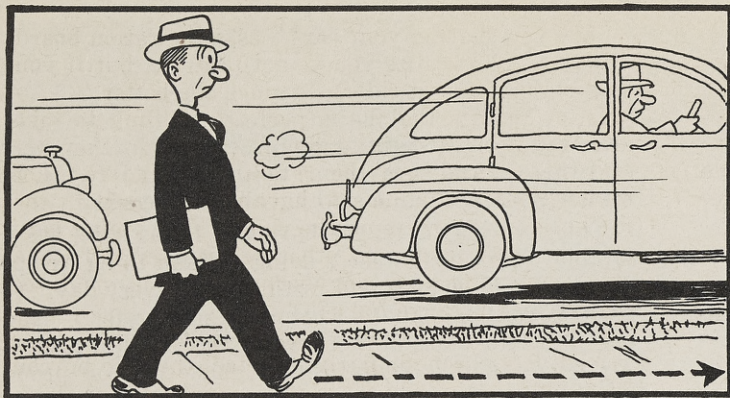
Don't you see? I'm really fighting side by side with you. You're out there, fighting the Japs. And I'm right here, ready to fight the Japs or any other enemy or emergency that might come along. The State Guard's job is to protect the home you're coming back to. That means a lot to me.

By the way, Mom has lost that worried look. And she's got two service stars in the window now!

Lots of love, son.

DAD



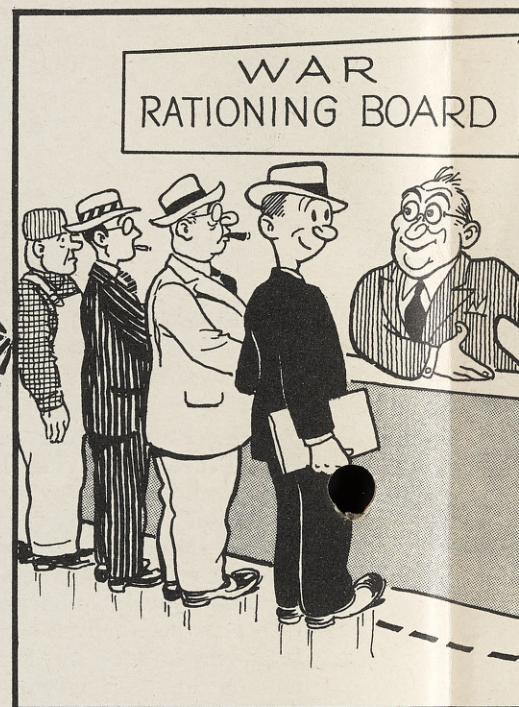


GAS: Authorities maintain coop of conserving sta's dwine

The strangest thing about the gasoline and rubber shortage in California is that Californians don't really believe there is a shortage.

Ever hear about the rich woman who went around charging things in the stores long after the family went broke? When you're used to wealth, it takes a long time to adopt the ways of poverty.

Gasoline poverty is what has hit gasoline-rich California. War has done it. But we still act as if we could drive up to a filling station and say "Fill 'er up!"



The truth is—and petroleum producers and Federal agencies are those who attest to it—that we are hitting rock bottom in our gasoline reserves in this State. If we use up any more of that reserve, we'll be imperilling the movement of food and war stuffs.

Drill some more wells?

We're tapping practically all there are right now.

Produce present wells faster?

We're already producing at the rate of maximum efficiency.

Stop using so much gasoline?

That, agree all the authorities except the man who skids around corners on two wheels, is the only answer.

Reason for California's gasoline shortage is simple. We're located at the jumping off place for a war theatre which is entering its hottest phase. Modern aerial war takes incredible amounts of fuel. Western fuel is the closest and most convenient. The drain on local resources is, therefore, little short of terrific.

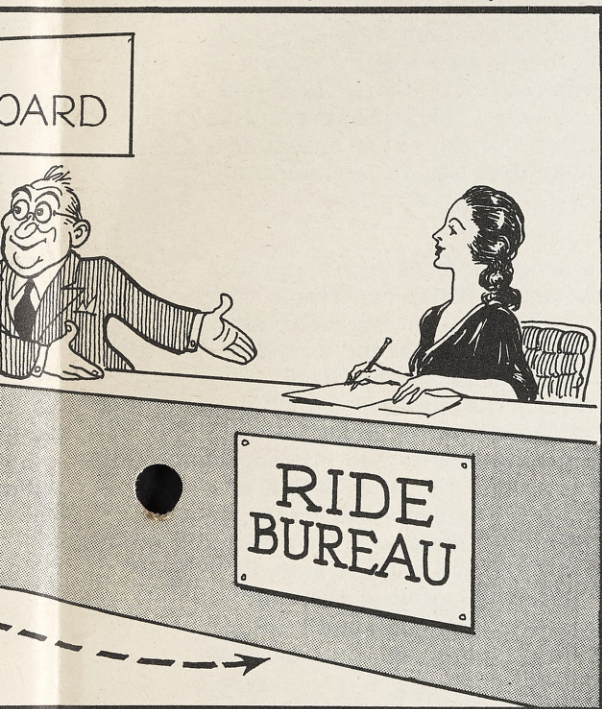
At the same time, California's civilization has literally grown up on wheels. Our cities, our industries, our way of life are predicated on the truck, the bus, jalopy, the family car, the business coupe. True it is

in cooperative ride sharing is the only way s dwindling supplies of gasoline and rubber

that every gallon of gasoline used by a civilian is a gallon used in competition with the armed forces. True it also is that most gallons of gasoline used by civilians are, under present conditions, essential to get that civilian through his day in a reasonably normal manner. The war would be hurt if California civilian life stopped functioning.

So what are we going to do about it?

Several California communities are already doing something about it. They have adopted a plan devised



by the Federal Office of Defense Transportation, the Office of Price Administration and the Office of Civilian Defense, which provides for making one gallon of gasoline do the work of four or five. No alchemy is involved, only a little common sense cooperation and forethought.

Granted that Mister A has to drive to work every morning because the buses and street cars are so crowded you have to hang on by your eyelashes and because he isn't anywhere near a bus line anyway. But how about Messrs. B, C and D, who drive from the same neighborhood, to the same business district, and for the same reasons? And how about Mister E, who goes to work on the street car, thanks to his long eyelashes, because he hasn't got a car? He's from the same neighborhood too.

Car sharing isn't a new idea, but the OPA-ODT-OCD plan is a great improvement over previous schemes because it takes the burden of arranging the sharing off the shoulders of a lone individual and pools the plans as well as the gas. The plan calls for establishing a ride bureau with each ration board, the bureau to be arranged by the defense council, manned by volunteers. Comes Mr. A to the ration board for his B card.

"Are you sharing your car?" asks the ration board politely. "We realize you've got to drive, but if you could arrange to get riders, so much the better."

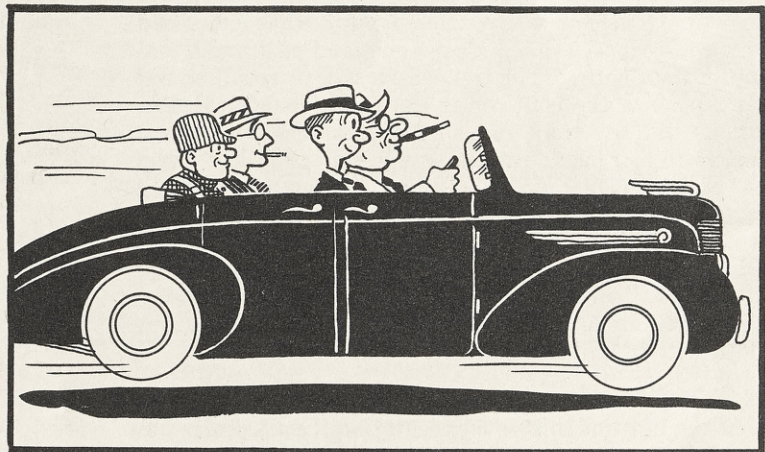
Mr. A reports that he is perfectly willing to take riders but doesn't know of any.

"Well, then," says the ration board, "Why not register your willingness to have passengers with the ride bureau over there on the right? The young lady will take your name and other particulars and when some people from your neighborhood come in, she'll see what she can arrange for you."

Next thing you know, Messrs. B, C and D have arrived, have been similarly directed, the ride bureau notifies all that a ride share plan is possible for them, and they decide to ride alternately in each car. Even Mr. E, desperately visiting the ride bureau to see whether there's any help for him, finds there's a daily extra seat for him too.

The gasoline saving is obvious.

The ride share plan is, of course, entirely voluntary, with the ration board serving only as host for the ride



bureau and as enthusiastic booster of the whole idea. Nobody is forced to share his car with unwelcome strangers. Nobody is threatened with revocation of needed rations. And willing volunteers do all the work of matching rides wanted with rides offered, and of matching neighborhood with neighborhood.

Pasadena is one city which has successfully pioneered in a ride-sharing plan very similar to that now proposed by the three Federal agencies. Its Junior Chamber of Commerce acts as a permanent clearing house for ride-sharing. The plan got its start as a result of a house-to-house warden and block leader canvass in the fall of 1942. Result of Pasadena's forehandedness was that when rationing began the rise in use of public transportation was 24 per cent, compared with 42 per cent for the rest of Los Angeles County.

Los Angeles is another city with a flourishing ride-share program. This one is modeled directly on the Federal ride bureau plan. At 40 ration boards and at police stations and war council branch offices, motorists may obtain car-sharing application cards which are being matched by a central war council office.

These are only two examples of a type of neighborly cooperation which is available to every city in California. You don't have to have local war industries to save gasoline and rubber—all you need is plenty of practical patriotism.

LOS ANGELES

Back to normal — plus — goes the city's vast disaster system

Ever heard the one about the "Los Angeles City Limits" sign in Alaska?

Most of California has chuckled at that exaggeration. But if they'd had the responsibility for protecting Los Angeles' vast area, its strategic, vital concentration of war plants, they might have laughed out of the other side of their faces.

At its peak, the Citizens Defense Corps of Los Angeles numbered more than 138,000 volunteers, a veritable army of eager citizens. Size, too, dictated the establishment of no less than 12 district control centers plus one main control center. In case of a large scale air attack, even 13 centers seemed like none too many.

Then came Lt. Gen. Delos C. Emmons' April 1st report to Governor Warren, confirming what many had begun to suspect regarding the changed military situation in the Pacific. The General, it will be recalled, did not minimize the continuing danger of enemy attack. But he did say that waves of planes are no longer a probability; rather, the Japanese will probably use a hit and run technique, sending commando raiding parties or a limited number of planes from some convenient off-shore carrier to harass carefully selected objectives. It is no longer probable that thousands of wardens will need to rush to phones all over the city. Things will be hot enough where the enemy strikes, but the territory will be limited.

Back to Normal

In the light of this new expectation, Los Angeles has decided to revert to its normal police and fire communications, augmented by communications of the Air Raid Warden Service. Incident reports of air raid wardens will be communicated to the 12 police division stations. From there they will be relayed to the appropriate dispatching headquarters of the several emergency services. Dispatching of emergency equipment

will be the job of each emergency service as in normal operations, and not of a district control center. The main control center will continue to operate as a clearing house for reports from the 12 districts and from the emergency services. It will be an assembly point for the mayor, who is also Commander of the Citizens Defense Corps, and for the various emergency chiefs.

Here is how the Los Angeles plan will work in case of attack:

In the event of sabotage, commando raid or submarine shelling, the emergency services will learn of the incidents through normal communications. These emergencies probably will be limited in area. They will require about the same kind of help as the regular services are equipped to handle in normal ways. Nor should such incidents tax the normal facilities of communication. In the event of air raids, normal reporting of incidents would be supplemented by reports of air raid wardens to their respective district headquarters in police division stations. These reports will be sifted by police executives and relayed as supplementary intelligence to the appropriate dispatching headquarters of the various emergency services.

Same, Only Better

The communications set-up is much like that which the city had before the war. Bitter experience with floods and earthquakes had made Los Angeles disaster conscious; its Major Disaster Plan was the forerunner of most civilian protection plans in the State. One difference now, however, is in the improved communications, including short-wave radio, that are available to the police, fire, public works, utilities and other services. Another vastly important difference is that tens of thousands of trained volunteers are now alert to take up assigned posts of duty when an emergency arrives. They are constantly subject to call and are alerted by the incident itself or by the sounding of the air raid alarm. Still another difference adding greatly to the total preparedness is the expansion of equipment to cope with disasters.

George Hjelte, General Director of the War Council, eyeing Los Angeles' vast area, is glad that the chances are slim that all of it will be attacked at once. However, he knows that a good disaster plan can handle the results of *any* calamity, from acts of God, such as flood or fire, to acts of enemy aggression, such as air attack. He believes—and the military have agreed with him—that the city's new communications plan will do as good a job as the former system of 13 control centers, even if Tojo should send the whole air force.

More About War Council

(Continued from page 1)

ing. Then the Governor will lay the problem before the Legislature at its special session early in June. The Legislature will be asked either to repeal the War Powers Act and to revert to an amended form of the 1929 Emergency Council Act, or else to amend the War Powers Act by reducing its civilian defense features to a minimum.

This reduction will not eliminate services now being performed in connection with war activities, the Governor emphasized. He said it is not intended to "abolish a single vital service which we are performing for the public."

(Continued on page 7)

FIREWORKS

That old-fashioned Fourth isn't beyond the realm of possibility this year. The Commanding General of the Ninth Service Command has authorized the Ninth Regional Civilian Defense Board to grant approval for fireworks displays in "appropriate cases" provided State War Council recommendation accompanies the application.

Local defense councils should forward fireworks display requests to the State Director of Civilian Defense, together with information showing that the plans allow for control of fire hazard, avoidance of personal injury, provision for immediate discontinuance of fireworks in case of a blackout, and clearance by the War Production Board of any critical materials to be used. All fireworks displays must, of course, comply with the rules of the State fire marshal and of local fire authorities. Therefore, a copy of the permit for the display given by the chief fire officer of the city or county should be attached, in accordance with Section 12504 of the State Health and Safety Code.

More About War Council

(Continued from page 6)

"We must recognize," said the Governor, "that civilian defense is not a static thing. It changes from month to month, depending upon the military conditions in this particular area. Obviously our conception of it today must differ from that of a year or two years ago."

Civilian defense, it was pointed out, is an outmoded term. The emphasis should now be upon readiness for any kind of emergency or disaster, now or after the war. The Governor referred to Lt. Gen. Delos C. Emmons' April 1st report, which emphasized that although widespread enemy attack is no longer probable, nuisance raids and disaster from fire, flood or earthquake are entirely possible and would be even more harmful to the war effort. Now that mutual aid and other defensive plans have been worked out, temporary bodies such as the War Council have completed their mission and may properly leave full responsibility in the hands of fire, law enforcement and other permanent, continuing authorities on both the local and the State level.

As far as war problems are concerned, Director Graves said the regular State governmental departments are best equipped to give leadership and guidance to cities and counties because without exception they have large trained field staffs and excellent technical background, whereas the War Council staff is necessarily limited in these respects.

The War Council's proposal contemplates retaining a small central staff, attached to the Governor's office, to coordinate the emergency activities of the State departments, to sift requests from Federal and other agencies for emergency action, to give information on emergency problems and to advise the communities on organization.

It was reported that General Emmons has given approval to the new plan as consistent with military safety.

Pending action by the Legislature, the present War Council and the present War Council staff will continue as before.

AS IT HAPPENS

In the Communities

(Continued from page 2)

Sacramento, Yuba, Yolo, Alameda, San Mateo and Sonoma counties. Other areas besides have completed preliminary work.

POINTS

Monterey County victory gardeners saved four and a half million blue ration points last year, preserved 325 tons of fruits and vegetables for use in winter months. Mrs. Frank Heple, women's director of war services, and Perry Henderson, Victory Garden committee chairman report several original devices to help local food production. Neighborhood consultants give free advice any time of the day or night. A freezing locker may be rented by anyone who chooses that method of food preservation. The local evening school is running a community canning center and a variety of food classes besides. Finally, there's to be a spring garden contest, with war bonds for prizes.

YOUTH

A permanent six-man committee, composed of three high school students and three adults, is planning a Youth Center for Sanger. Councilman L. G. Blue, who heads the local civilian defense organization, is following the plans with a view to financial support by the city.

KITCHEN

A Victory Kitchen, sponsored jointly by the Food and Nutrition Committees of the State War Council, the Alameda County council and the Oakland council, was one of the chief crowd-attraction points at

DISCONTINUED

City and county defense councils no longer need to submit to OCD Report Form 1, "Civilian Protection Report," to the State War Council.

The Federal Office of Civilian Defense advises that their statistics section has been abolished. The information on Form No. 1 is therefore not required.

Oakland's recent Victory Garden Show, held April 20-23 in the Exposition Building. Presiding over the vegetable laden counter were how-to-cook-it experts who showed how to do everything from making tiny sandwiches for "Wartime Hospitality" to "How to Cook a Garden." Between times, women swarmed the exhibit to get leaflets on vitamins, vegetables and food values and to get some private, between-us-women advice on their cooking problems. The show was the brainchild of the Oakland Defense Council and was put on under auspices of the Junior Chamber of Commerce.

FREE

Pressure cookers will be tested free in any Pacific Gas and Electric Company area, according to a directive which the company's headquarters has sent to all its division managers.

SUGGESTIONS

Two suggestions, more than any other, made Victory Gardening a success in Riverside County, reports Ralph E. Hughes, War Services Director. The defense council has just issued a second edition of its "best-seller" *Home Vegetable*

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... women swarmed the exhibit ...



STATE GUARD

Following are the regional offices to which local leaders may apply for further information regarding the State Guard:

Eureka: State Armory, phone 639

Redding: 1123 East Street, Phone 1859 MX

San Francisco: 1800 Mission St., phone HEMlock 9602

Sacramento: Twelfth and W Streets, phone 2-6015

Salinas: State Armory, phone 5367

Fresno: 928 L Street, phone 3-3770

San Bernardino: 246 Third Street, phone 5-5540

Los Angeles: 700 Exposition Blvd., phone PRospect 9602

Escondido: Box 225, phone 267 J

AS IT HAPPENS

In the Communities

(Continued from page 7)

Garden pamphlet. Quoting from page 13:

"Anyone having a garden of 600 square feet or more and using water furnished by the City of Riverside, may apply for a reduced water rate * * * If there is a vacant lot near you, suggest to the owner that you garden it—he will save the yearly weed removal cost. If you are an owner—offer it to the neighbors."

SURVEY

At the request of the **USO Travelers Aid Society**, the **Inglewood Citizens Service Corps** volunteered to survey the city to secure housing listings. An open letter went to all home owners, pointing out that a few days' shelter for a serviceman's wife might make it possible for her to see her husband for the last time.

ARMY

Civilian defense is even more important on an Army base than anywhere else, says J. H. Martin, Chief of the Civilian Defense Corps at the San Bernardino Air Service Command. The Army is depending on that group to augment military defenses in case of trouble. The war

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SEC. 562, P. L. & R.
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Sacramento, Cal.
Permit No. 225

Modesto hotel fire brings out equipment from 8 cities and State in striking mutual aid test

Mutual aid has proved itself in Modesto.

At 10.30 on the night of Wednesday, May 3d, it seemed to frightened observers that all of Modesto had burst into flame. Actually, a small fire in a paint store ignited the Modesto Hotel building in which the store was located. It seemed hardly any time at all before the blazing frame interior of the five-story brick building had scattered fatal sparks and had ignited an area of seven blocks. There were 30 separate fires, eight of them in one lumber yard, the rest perilous roof blazes.

Obviously, the seven pieces of Modesto fire equipment, its 44 regular men who could be called to the scene, were inadequate for a disaster of such proportions. Fire Chief George Wallace sized up the situation at once. He ordered his dispatcher to call for mutual aid.

Within 10 minutes, equipment from the neighboring fire districts was in action at the fire. McHenry-Dry Creek District sent two pieces of equipment, 11 men. Riverbank sent one piece, and 10 men. The State Division of Forestry dispatched two pieces of equipment with five men. And Turlock, Patterson, Oakdale and Waterford were standing by, ready to dispatch men and apparatus at the moment they were needed. A total of eight cities were helping Modesto.

worker army, in turn, holds wardens' meetings once a month, maintains a fully equipped control center and makes day and night semi-monthly inspections of all buildings. Mr. Martin says they've proved that 200 people can be evacuated from a warehouse in one minute.

Besides all this, Modesto was able to bring into action 30 auxiliary firemen, plus auxiliary policemen, Shore Patrol, and Military Police.

They battled the Modesto Hotel fire until 11 o'clock the next morning, took 45 people out of windows, suffered one death when a man fell from a ladder. All told, 5,500 feet of 2½-inch hose had been called into play, 1,900 feet of 1½-inch hose.

By the time it was over, Modesto had a new and vivid notion of the value of trained firemen. Many were also talking about the silver lining even in war's dark cloud.

"I can remember the day," mused one citizen, "when they'd bring equipment up to the city limits and watch a fire across the line without moving a wheel to help."

War, obviously, has put into firemen's hands a new and valuable weapon of cooperation.

War has also brought countless willing auxiliaries into action in time of need, a new kind of neighborliness which bids fair to carry over into peace-time.

Both Chief Wallace and County Fire Warden O. S. Ball, whose responsibility in large part the mutual aid plan is, are collecting congratulations in Modesto these days. Although the hotel fire was actually the sixth time mutual aid had proved itself in Stanislaus County, the occasion was the most dangerous. It will be recalled that a recent report from the Western Defense Command stressed that natural disaster, such as fire, was likely to be as detrimental to the war effort as enemy action. Stanislaus County may, therefore, congratulate itself on having successfully fought an engagement in World War II.